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ABSTRACT

Researchers and theorists have been discussing the relationship between cognition and affect for many years, contemplating whether or not thought is necessary to emotion. A study was undertaken to gain information about the relationship between cognition and affect with reference to psychopathology. To examine the relationship between cognitive distortion and change in depressed mood over time, data were collected from two samples of clinic outpatients. Fifteen outpatients who were being treated without medication for depressed mood were recruited from a community mental health center during the Christmas/New Year's period of 1983-84. Fourteen subjects came from a university clinical center during the Christmas/New Year's holiday of 1984-85. Both samples were administered pre-holiday, holiday, and post-holiday testings of Ellis' Irrational Beliefs, a measure of Beck's Cognitive Distortions, a Depression Scale, and the State Form of the State-Trait Anxiety Scale. No significant differences were found between the two samples on these measures, so they were treated as one sample. The results obtained suggest that no form of causal relationship exists between cognition and affect. The relationships found were similar to those obtained in the measurement of a multi-trait factor, and the hypothesis advanced is that both are aspects of a higher-order phenomenon. (NB)

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Relationships Between Cognition and Affect in Depressed Outpatients[1]

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Discussion of the relationship between cognition and affect has a long history. Two recent articles focus this discussion well; the one (Lazarus, 1982) arguing that thought is necessary to emotion, and the other (Zajone, 1980) arguing that that is not so. Lewinsohn (1981), approaching the question from a more rigidly empirical stance, outlined the problem in antecedent/consequent terms.

The intent of this research was to provide information regarding this relationship with reference to psychopathology. Although antecedence is not crucial to the more fundamental question, it is certainly relevant and was a consideration in designing this study. Fundamentally, the intent was to gather information regarding the relationship between cognitive distortion and change in depressed mood over time.

1. Presented at the American Psychological Association Convention, Los Angeles, CA, 1985.

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Secondarily, it was hypothesized that depression would increase as a function of the Christmas/New Year's holidays.

Procedure

Subjects

Data was collected from two samples of clinic outpatients. The first sample of 15 subjects was drawn from a Community Mental Health Center during the Christmas/New Year's period of 1983-84. The second sample of 14 was drawn from a University Clinical Center during the Christmas/New Year's period of 1984-85. All subjects were being seen by psychotherapists. Selection for participation in the study was done by the facilities' staffs, in order to preserve confidentiality in accordance with the facilities' guidelines. Selection was based on the following criteria formulated by the experimenter.

1. Depressed mood was a focus of treatment, not complicated by thought disorder nor cyclic tendencies.
2. Medication was not being used in treatment.
3. The subject possessed at least average reading comprehension.
4. Mood was not affected by any known unusual environmental stress.

The first sample of data was collected according to the following schedule in 1983-84.

Pre-Holiday Test Period- 11/1/83-12/15/83

Holiday Test Period - 12/16/83-1/5/84

Post Holiday Test Period - 1/7/84-1/30/84

The second sample of data was collected according to the following schedule in 1984-85.

Pre-Holiday Test Period - 11/15/84-12/15/84

Holiday Test Period - 12/20/84-1/5/85

Post Holiday Test Period - 1/7/85-1/19/85

Measures

Four measures were administered at three separate testing times to each subject. These were Ellis' Irrational Beliefs (IB) (Ellis, 1962), a measure of Beck's Cognitive Distortions (CD) (Lefebvre, 1980), a Depression Scale (D) (Radloff, 1977) (NIH, 1978), and the State Form of the State-Trait Anxiety Scale (A) (Spielberger, 1966). These measures were administered by facility staff, with each subject's test booklets identified by a subject number.

Thus to summarize briefly, subjects completed these measures on three separate occasions, which may be termed Pre-Holiday (Pre-H), Holiday (Hol), and Post-Holiday (Post-H).

Results

No significant differences were found between the two outpatient samples on the measures used in the study, so they were treated as one sample.

At the same points in time, high correlations were found between A and D, so these two scales were summed to form a Negative Affect (NA) score for each subject at each time period. These intercorrelations are presented in Table 1,

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Table 1 about here

The means and standard deviations for the group on the measures of IB, CD, and NA are presented in Table 2. As noted, significant t-tests resulted when the mean score on NA Post-Holiday was compared with the mean score on NA Holiday and with the mean score on NA Pre-Holiday. No significant differences between time periods were found on either cognitive measure.

Table 2 about here

The intercorrelations of the measures are presented in Table 3. As indicated, almost all of the coefficients were statistically significant.

Table 3 about here

Conclusions

The NA of these depressed outpatients increased over the time periods studied; however, the notable increase in NA occurred between the Holiday and Post-Holiday test periods. This suggests that the effect of the holiday season on mood may become manifest somewhat after the nominal holiday season. It is also worth noting that being concerned with the effect of the holiday season and depression may be too narrow a concern; anxiety, at least, increased proportionately and there is no empirical reason to reject the idea that other aspects of emotional behavior may be affected, as well.

With regard to the correlations obtained between the measures, it appears that the measure of IB is less clearly and systematically related to NA. If anything, the relationship appears to be moderate and relatively stable, regardless of which time periods are compared.

The correlations between CD and NA seem somewhat more systematic. When considered at any particular time period, the relationship between the two is moderately high. No clear predictive nor postdictive relationship is indicated by these data, however.

The conclusion drawn from this study is that no form of causal relationship exists between cognition and affect. The relationships found are similar to those obtained in the measurement of a multi-trait factor, and the hypothesis advanced is that both are aspects of a higher-order phenomenon.

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Table 1

Intercorrelations of A, D, and NA over Time Periods

	A_1	A_2	A_3	D_1	D_2	D_3	NA_1	NA_2	NA_3
A_1		.69	.64	.71	.56	.58	.95	.68	.64
A_2			.79	.47	.72	.59	.64	.94	.74
A_3				.53	.66	.78	.64	.79	.95
D_1					.50	.56	.90	.52	.57
D_2						.75	.58	.92	.73
D_3							.61	.71	.93
NA_1								.66	.66
NA_2									.80

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations on IB, CD, and NA over Time Periods

	Pre-H		Hol		Post-H	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
IB	38.10	(16.16)	39.03	(17.95)	37.07	(16.41)
CD	49.34	(16.94)	50.55	(20.31)	48.72	(16.81)
NA	43.83	(23.43)	45.93	(25.45)	51.59	(29.48)*

* $\bar{X}_{\text{NA Post-H}} - \bar{X}_{\text{NA Hol}} : t_{df=28} = 1.69 \ (p < .05)$

* $\bar{X}_{\text{NA Post-H}} - \bar{X}_{\text{NA Pre-H}} : t_{df=28} = 1.85 \ (p < .05)$

Table 3

Interrelations of CD, IB, and NA over Time Periods

	CD_1	CD_2	CD_3	IB_1	IB_2	IB_3	NA_1	NA_2	NA_3
CD_1		.73	.75	.46	.46	.44	.41	.34	.22*
CD_2			.79	.33	.42	.41	.55	.60	.45
CD_3				.44	.45	.56	.56	.54	.57
IB_1					.84	.78	.40	.05*	.20*
IB_2						.90	.44	.32	.30
IB_3							.48	.38	.43

* $p<.05$